

# THE NEWS LETTER

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OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH AS PERIODICAL DEPT N

IV, No. 4

PERIODICAL DEPT.

Be Sensible

out Slang

recent book, *The Story of Our Language*, by Henry Alexander, professor of English Language Literature at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, confesses its author admits, nothing except its arrangement. The words and details of its purview changes the English language has undergone is excellent makes interesting reading, but beats one familiar statement might well be modified. This echo of a popular misconception of the nature of slang—it is "the illegitimate sister of."

Alexander says, in effect, most slang is ephemeral. So much of it is, but an amazingly large proportion of it is long lived. In a vocabulary of 2,000 slang expressions I have collected and studied, 60 per cent to 70 per cent of it still current, I find, date back twenty-five years. If anyone knows this, let him consider such known and well-worn terms as *bum, bell-hop, booze, boost, cop, do, e, fresh, fake, fan, hunch, kid, kick, loony, pep, rubberneck, scab, and tight-* and countless other popular expressions, some of which are fast losing standard English.

The law I have deduced is this: a slang expression replaces a literary word that is perfectly adequate, it not only permutes, but also gradually of wider and of significance. *Pretty girl* becomes successively from *daisy*, to *pi-pin*, *pip*, even *nectarine*. It also widens and weakens in the course of a time, and even a *peach* might. But when slang supplies the need of expressing a new thing, or a nuance of meaning, unlikely to permute. The good word *chestnut*, for instance, has been supplanted by newer Neologisms like *blurb, fink, hiff, goo, hike, lam, mum, pep, and wham* have, on the whole, later life expectancy than dictionary words whose meanings have been merely altered.

When he shifts from slang to literary and the validity of radical changes resulting from its usage, Dr. Alexander finds it further to the left. He is full of the efficacy, or indeed desirability, of interference to ignore distortions and be- in letting nature take its course. His complaisance with this view from below goes, indeed to the point of poking gentle fun at students who still say, "It is I." He feels that the word "whom" has become a linguistic fossil. Finally, however, he still combats

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UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS: PHILADELPHIA

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## The Question of What and How

If one unacquainted with the idiosyncrasies of college English teachers were to read THE NEWS LETTER for the first time, he might conclude that he had come upon a most peculiar and interesting subdivision of the human race, one that would like to think it was doing things of importance but was uncertain exactly what to do or how to do it and was worried over the criticism of its deeds. And he would be right.

In the first place we worry too much over the subject matter of our courses and what somebody else may think about it. We may begin with Plato and proceed to P. G. Wodehouse (who, by the way, is represented in the latest survey volume); and it doesn't make a particle of difference whether this is the students' favorite kind of reading or not. As long as the course deals with something in which the teacher is vitally interested, he can make it appeal to the student, if he can make any appeal, and relate it to contemporary life. My own belief is that we can find out more about America from Mark Twain than we can from John Steinbeck or William Faulkner.

Again we worry, prodded no doubt by the ubiquitous Educationists, over methods of teaching literature and composition, but particularly the latter. Let us recognize the fact that beyond certain general principles, methods of teaching are a matter for the indi-

vidual. They depend upon the peculiar ability of the teacher and the special needs of his students; and they will differ from classroom to classroom and college to college. It is well to learn the different methods employed. But when any one thinks that a way can be found of testing objectively a student's ability to write, he is deluding himself. Nowadays teachers may even disagree about what constitutes correct grammar and diction, and though Latin is now shamefully neglected, we may still declare, "*De gustibus non est disputandum.*"

Against one danger, however, the teacher of English should guard especially, and that concerns the function of his office. Mr. Bernard DeVoto has declared that writing fiction for the popular magazines is a branch of the entertainment business. There are certain misguided persons who have the same conception of lectures on English literature. Not that the lecturer should fail to be entertaining. Heaven forbid! But certainly we are entitled to expect more than a species of intellectual vaudeville with prizes for everybody (grades of A or B) at the end. The English teacher must stimulate the desire for learning and cause the student to explore literature for himself and reach his own conclusions about it.

R. Balfour Daniels  
The University of Houston

## The First "R"

I think I know why American higher education writes its annual check for the tidy sum of two and a half million dollars, which is my snap estimate of the bill for college instruction in more or less elementary English composition. The Editor has been authorized to shave this figure, if necessary to prevent the odor of red herring from crossing my main issue.

The mystery has been solved for me in an innocent-looking little volume which lurks on our library reference shelves for the benefit of some young ladies who are training to be teachers in the elementary schools of our state. The author of the innocent-looking little book (*The Improvement of Reading*, by Luella Cole, Farrar & Rinehart, 1938) has a host of educators in agreement with her; hence she is not entitled to all the blame for the annual leakage of such an attractive sum from the budget. But an obligation is an obligation.

Space will permit me to cull only a few sentences here and there, just a few clues to point in the direction of the corpse.

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## A Bid for Students

In the March issue of THE NEWS LETTER, Professor Louis Hasley was gracious enough to write some welcome and gratifying comments on my little item called "What Books?" which appeared in the December issue. I hasten to assure Professor Hasley that I admit the value of the *Idea of a University*, *Past and Present*, and *Walden*. I agree that to present these classics successfully offers a stimulating challenge to the teacher. I admit that in college a student should learn through literature to tap the sources of wisdom. I admit that taste for great literature must be nourished. But, I must beg leave to say, all this in good time.

Professor Hasley says that he fears that by the use of books with "immediate appeal" the work of our colleges would be devitalize by a "boring from within." A fear that literature in college is the victim of a chiseling from without caused me to prescribe for the "unlettered sophomore" as I did. We know perfectly well the efficacy of literature as a preparation for life. Others, students and faculty alike,

(Continued on Page 4)

## Plain English Vs. Imaginative Obscurity

Freshman English survives as the last nostrum administered to all college students—the dosage is much the same though the prescription varies. Often so much is distilled into one mixture that doctors are fearful and the patients stagger. After the diagnosis of several hundred students the following prescription was made up to remedy two complaints.

For the past three years the English faculty in Elmira College has sought to recognize sound preparation in composition; secondly, to determine the attainment of a college standard by means of an objective test rather than by a grade in a required course. Entering students have written for one to two hours an Attainment Test on one of thirty or more topics taken from Regents and College Board examinations covering subjects accepted for admission. The papers have been read independently by two or three instructors and discussed in departmental meetings. Students who demonstrate an ability to write efficient, interesting prose have been credited with having met the College requirement. The remaining majority has enrolled in Freshman Composition and has later been tested again in February and June, on these occasions with topics supplied by instructors in all freshman courses. From three years' experience with the Attainment Test and the results in classes, from conferences with high school principals and teachers, and from a recent questionnaire answered by students and teachers involved in the experiment, we have learned the following:

With a few exceptions, preparatory courses in English are taken up more with literature than with composition (though instruction in composition is increasing), and two-thirds of the students feel better prepared for final examinations in literature than for examinations in composition. The instruction in composition emphasizes imaginative writing rather than exposition, with the result that students come to look upon writing as a medium of personal or literary expression and not as a useful means of communication. Originality is often cultivated at the expense of clarity. A third of the freshmen do not know what is meant by exposition, and, in spite of the conscientious efforts of English teachers in secondary schools to relate instruction in writing to other subjects in the curriculum, the overwhelming majority of students is convinced that other pre-

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## Common Sense?

In this troubled month hundreds of young men and women who have been cloistered in our graduate schools are sending letters north and south and east and west, enclosing multigraphed records of "background and experience." To consider them in truly academic fashion will require a multiplicity of heads:

a) A large percentage of our colleges and universities when seeking new instructors show preference for those who have earned the doctor's degree, no matter what is to be taught.

b) Whether a new English instructor is to conduct courses in "literature" or "composition" is generally a question of administrative expediency rather than of individual fitness for the task. It is assumed that any young instructor with a degree must be equally well fitted to teach either, and probably will have to teach both.

c) If the new instructor is assigned to freshman classes in literature, his service to the majority of his students will be slight unless he spends most of his time helping them to set up a scale of values to be used in appraising literary works of art—even though his nominal job is an objective survey of the history and tradition of English prose and poetry.

d) The chances are eight to one that in his graduate school most of his study was objective and historical; that he was not compelled to gain perspective by training in appreciation of other fine arts, or to define a critical philosophy of his own and be able to defend it. In a word, he was not specially trained for his job.

e) If he is to teach composition, the chances are nine to one that in his graduate school no training was required (perhaps not even offered)

in written expression, and the thesis itself was viewed only as evidence of research accomplished and not as a proof of literary skill.

f) The traditional form and structure of academic theses was such that practice in writing them harmed rather than benefited literary style.

g) He, too, was not specifically trained for his job.

h) If the dignity of an institution (or even its lack of dignity) requires that all of its faculty be Doctors of Philosophy, then in the case of English instructors possession of the degree is not enough. It becomes necessary to examine all institutions granting the degree, and to patronize only those few which actually fit their graduates for the complicated business of teaching freshman classes in both English Literature and Composition.

i) But there are no such institutions.

j) If the degree is not essential and not a final assurance of fitness, then we come face to face with this question: What is the ideal training for an instructor of freshman English? Admitting our own inability to answer, we have turned to an amused and disinterested Observer from Mars. He answers as follows:

The training of a Composition teacher might well be four years of everything a good liberal arts college has to offer, then two years of self-support by practical and disciplined use of the written word, and a final year with the Decoding Division of the Military Intelligence.

The adequate training of a freshman Literature instructor should include the earning of an A.B. and a B.S., followed by one year in an art school, one year with a critical review or good publishing house, one year in a theological seminary or school of social service, and a final year as attendant in a sanitarium for the maladjusted.

Note: Our consultant is returning at once to Mars, and assures us that he cannot be reached by mail, radio, or thought-wave.

## Coney-Catching Up to Date

"Get rich quick" is a siren song that for centuries has enticed life's travelers onto the rocks. "Get educated quick" is sung to the same tune, with only slight variation in the words. "Clip the coupon, pay a dollar down, and in twenty lessons you can command a ten-thousand-a-year salary," is one of the stanzas.

The sirens of this chorus who have sung longest and loudest are those who promise to make poets, essayists, and story-writers of us. "Why bend over the washboard any longer?" they carol; "you too have a life story to tell." Or "Song poems wanted! Millions are made in royalties from popular songs." Or "Write for the movies: In a few lessons we will teach you all the tricks of scenario writing."

They are so convincing, some of these sirens, that it makes us quite miserable to realize how unsuccessful we are, by comparison, in our efforts to make passable letter-

writers out of a lot of college freshmen in thirty-two weeks, or even sixty-four. Perhaps if we were a little more mysterious about the secret recipes we possess, or if we made a few more promises—Ah well!

And then there are those little periodicals which make the business of writing and the profession of authorship seem so easily within reach! It is hardly fair to mention them in the same breath with the sirens of the advertising columns, for the best of them offer a good deal of wheat with the chaff, and a teacher of composition may often gain ideas and stimulus from their pages.

They vary, however. One of them has been circularizing us teachers lately, and we find ourselves examining its printed matter with an aroused curiosity. A multigraphed letter, one page long, contains seventeen errors—spelling, punctuation, grammatical usage, and typographical mistakes. An accompanying printed circular contains nineteen. We are assured that an ambitious young writer cannot afford to do without it. At least its subscribers may practice proof-reading.

## Adventure in Etymology

The other day the mail brought a letter and a 16-page pamphlet from one, George Powloff, of 1341 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, N. M., who identifies himself only as "publisher." "I implore you," said Mr. Powloff's letter, "to examine the enclosed pamphlet with an OPEN MIND."

Any reference to an open mind, especially in large caps, is something of a challenge. Besides, Mr. Powloff was very flattering. "Your responsibility as a TEACHER OF WORDS or LIFE is tremendous," he declared, and then begged to remain "with the kindest, purest, loving thoughts and feelings for you." And so the pamphlet, "English: the Language of the Angels, as revealed to George Powloff," received close scrutiny.

Here are selections from a list of 55 words arranged in some order that must have seemed best to Mr. Powloff:

HEAVEN is derived from "heave" or "raise," so that this word again teaches one to *heave* on or raise his thoughts and feelings from a lower to a higher state of consciousness, thereby entering heaven, which liberates him from the lower or undesirable state.

UNIVERSE is composed of U-N-I-VERSE. U is an abbreviation standing for you; N is an abbreviation standing for the mathematical symbol of "an indefinite number"; I is the LIGHT within you or your TRUE SELF; finally the word VERSE stands for what is so beautifully expressed in Webster's College, Home and Office Dictionary as "part of an anthem for performance by a single voice to each part," or as Webster's New International Dictionary gives it: "a metric arrangement in language," all of which proves [as of course it

must] that English and metrical or mathematical arrangements are identical and harmonious, bringing only perfect results.

ADAM is composed of A-DAM or an obstruction. The DAM being the obstruction to the ability to see the Truth or the "blaze of light" or ET[H]ER within all things in the U-N-I-VERSE.

ADAMANT is composed of A-DAM-ANT and clearly tells you to be ANT or against the A-DAM or obstructing consciousness within yourself, which would try to tell you that you cannot do all things. Thus to be A-DAM-ANT is to be against the false idea that you are the offspring of A-DAM or an obstruction.

Mr. Powloff is not very clear about the use that teachers can make of his allegorical etymologies, which have a faint savor of the *Bestiary*, but no doubt his pamphlet will put the reader in a better frame of mind. Certainly it should bring out the best in any member of the College English Association. The cover hints that additional copies can be had for 25 cents.

## Not to Be Read in Class

As felicitous an instance of futile classicism as can well be found is the conventional spelling of the English language. English orthography satisfies all the requirements of the canons of respectability under the law of conspicuous waste. It is archaic, cumbersome, and ineffective; its acquisition consumes much time and effort; failure to acquire it is easy of detection.—Vebien

## From the Mail-Bag

Dear Editor:

I should like to make two suggestions to professors of English:

1) That those who have not done so read R. C. Trench's *English Past and Present* and *The Study of Words*.

What matters it that they are long out of print and procurable now only occasionally at places like Leary's Old Book Store, Philadelphia? To me there are no other books on the English language half so inspiring.

2) That they read, in *School and Society* for February 24, 1940, the article by Geraldine P. Dilla, entitled "Words, Words, Words." It is an excellent study of the critical state in which our language now finds itself in students' minds, by a keen observer who knows what she is talking about. Readers can readily check her findings by their own experiments.

I make the second recommendation under the painful assurance that almost no teachers of English ever read *School and Society*, just as almost no professional educationists bother themselves about THE NEWS LETTER.

A. M. Withers  
Concord State Teachers College  
Athens, West Virginia



## The Humanities

[The following was presented at a recent state conference on teacher-training at Syracuse University in response to a request for a definition that would represent the point of view of English teachers. Does it arouse anyone to disagreement?—Ed.]

We of course know what we mean by the "Humanities." But since this word is used so loosely in common parlance, since even the dictionary cautiously defines it as "classical and polite literature," it does no harm to emphasize our interpretation: that the Humanities are those studies which are primarily concerned with man's effort to understand and develop his own intellectual and spiritual resources.

Obviously much humanistic activity includes philosophy, history, and art as well as literature. (With the predilection of those who like to insist on distributing labels—a label, for instance, on history as a science rather than a humanistic study—we will not interfere.)

The study of the Humanities, in our view, represents an approach, an attitude, a desire to know the best that has been known and thought in the world rather than an absorption in a technique or in a subject matter, narrowly considered. The Humanities are more interested in the cultural significance of knowledge and in the relationship between the various areas of knowledge than they are with the manipulation of the tools of knowledge. In essence they concern themselves with those profoundly important imponderables "truth" and "beauty"—and with all that the understanding of these gives to man's dignity and his conviction of his own worth, both as an individual and as a member of a social order.

All this amounts to saying that the Humanities are the liberal studies which train the intelligence to see its subject and its problems in all their bearing; and, given this perspective, to feel that freedom of choice which encourages discovery. Thus only can our cultural heritage remain a dynamic possession, added to and freshly explored by new interpretations. Humanistic study, in its widest sense, is a discipline in what T. M. Greene has called "the essential faculties of reflection, imagination, and volition."

If it is a weakness to interpret the meaning of the Humanities so broadly, we can only plead that these studies do indeed interpenetrate every area of human experience which is concerned with moral and spiritual and intellectual values. A negative way of defining the Humanities is to say that they are not chiefly concerned with vocational or utilitarian ends, even though it often happens that their study facilitates the mastery of such ends.

Harold Blodgett  
Union College

## British Humor Desired

I have been engaged by Coward-McCann, publishers, to prepare an anthology of British humor. The book will be a companion to the *Subtreasury of American Humor*, by E. B. White and K. S. White. It should appear in the late autumn of this year.

Humor, or humour, is to be broadly interpreted. The book will admit the maidenly arch and the loud buffoonish, the ogle and the pratfall. It will include both prose and verse. It will embrace all times; my first example is an eleventh-century Irish tale. The Dominions and the colonies are welcomed. The book will be decently gay, that it may be put in the hands of priests and virgins, as Sterne used to say. It will eschew, usually, the well-worn anthology pieces. The eventual choices are to be left solely to the caprice of the editor.

I should be very happy to have suggestions. Naturally I am not going to overlook the obvious, or I hope not. But I think that many members of the Association must have happened on some superb bit of comedy in the byways of English literature. How about the medieval tale that you told to the giggling Faculty Club? Or that fine thing you clipped out of *Punch* twenty years ago? Or that magnificent song the boys sang in Oxford? Or that story someone read aloud at a house party, amid shouts of glee?

If you think of something which belongs in such an anthology, do let me know, and that soon. I can't promise to use it, of course; I must have the courage of my own sense of humor. But it would be kinder of you to send it to me now than to blame me, after the fact, because it is missing.

Morris Bishop  
903 Wyckoff Road  
Ithaca, N. Y.

## The First "R"

(Continued from Page 1)

"There is," she writes on p. 5, "no reason why anyone should be able to spell every word he can read, because few people use in writing more than a tenth of their reading vocabulary." Consider that as an approach to education! No wonder we have to teach spelling to college freshmen! And as for the logic, why should we not invert the syllogism?

Then on p. 8 I meet the old argument that one cannot in English relate sound and spelling and meaning because "the nature of the English language is unfortunately not phonetic." I assume that our author means that many of our words are not spelled phonetically in certain of their syllables. Of course, the spelling of many English words is confusing to the beginner, but that is no justification for the sly assumption that other language skills are thus affected. Our partially unphonetic spelling is merely a technical difficulty in the way of the teacher and one very easily solved in the first

few grades by relatively simple adjustments of a basic technique of language instruction.

I can just pause over the author's notion that educational methods must keep up with modern conditions. Her logic appears to involve the staggering injunction to increase our reading speed in proportion to the steadily enlarging output of the presses since the discovery of printing. Perhaps she does not mean to force the conclusion. But on this point she does become specific: "An average ten-year-old child of today probably reads more in a year than his grandfather did in six." (p. 15) Which six? and are we to consider the nature of the reading? And anyhow, it is a gross libel on grandfathers.

Finally, there is the theory, albeit somewhat confusing, embedded in the following fragments: "The same results [that is, in reading—not spelling, obviously, or other language skills] can be achieved in less time if reading is isolated from both spelling and speech." (p. 5) If the pupil holds the sounds of words in his mind "he is likely throughout his life to articulate each word more or less completely to himself . . . a set of habits that must be discontinued before he can learn to read efficiently." (p. 6) This is the penalty (though the italics are mine) attaching to the crime of letting one's inner ear hear what his eye readeth, or to use the author's phrase, the penalty of the "slow and cumbersome inner speech." "During the first half year of school," she continues (p. 59), "it possibly does no harm [i.e. to use oral reading] because the pupils cannot read faster silently than they can orally; but at any later time, training in oral reading is undesirable."

And in another connection (p. 12) we find this high praise for the "look-and-say" method of reading: "The outstanding advantages are, then, its foundation in a purely visual process and its dissociation from speech." The text does not, however, disclose how one may look-and-say without any speech involvement. On the other hand, I learn from p. 15 that the teacher "must also give training in speech, because extensive silent reading does not bring about correct and clear pronunciation. There is no need, however, for oral reading as a means of drill in speech. . . . Silent reading is not the subject in the curriculum by means of which the training in speech can best be given." ("Obviously," she might have added.) The curriculum in the elementary schools has apparently divided itself with all the lawless profusion of malignant growth.

In short, this innocent-looking little text has goaded me to the verge of some affirmations of my own.

1) It is impossible to separate "content" from language awareness and still retain any literary savor. Thought content without language awareness is clouded and its subtleties are befogged.

2) It is possible (and of course desirable) to accelerate this "slow and cumbersome inner speech" to the limits of *practicable* reading speed. And the gain is that all the words can retain their identity as meaningful sound. When the need arises for a hurried technique of skimming—and it won't be for a good many years down the educational path—the mind, then more mature, can master it.

3) The psychology of teaching "silent" reading, "oral" reading, public speaking, dramatics, literature, written composition, grammar; and even spelling, as separate "subjects" is inherently false. They are one subject, LANGUAGE; and if they have not been thought of as one it is because the educators, having lost sight of the fact that speech and hearing are the focal point of all language studies, have failed to pull them into a single significant pattern.

4) The results of language instruction in grade schools and high schools are on the whole shameful. I can see only one conclusion: the methods are unsuccessful. Until they are changed, a lot of us will continue to make our living teaching elementary language skills to college matriculates.

Harold C. Binkley  
Juniata College

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## A Generous Helping

*The College Survey of English Literature*, edited by B. J. Whitney, Fred B. Millett, Alexander M. Witherspoon, Odell Shepard, Arthur P. Hudson, Edward Wagenknecht, Louis Untermeyer; 2 vols., Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942.

Those that are statistically inclined may be interested to learn that this collection of materials for the survey course in English literature weighs seven pounds two ounces and that, including the publisher's preface, the editors' introductions to the respective periods, indices, suggestions for further reading, and the readings themselves—but not the four plates of illustrations that appear at the beginning of each of the seven sections—the two volumes comprise a total of 2,311 pages.

Furthermore, since each of the pages contains approximately 1,000 words, the editors have provided the student with 2,311,000 words. If he has a speed of 100 words a minute, which no doubt is very slow by Miss Stella Center's standards but fast if the selections are from books that must be chewed and digested, as is of course the case here, the student has been given 400 solid hours of reading.

From which it may appear that this impressive book is being taken for something of a ride. But that is not the intention. Granted that the ideal in teaching literature is for the student to purchase and keep individual works of literature, or, barring this, to be provided with them by the library, such an ideal is impossible of realization in large survey classes. And though much may be said against "megatomes," as they were labeled by a recent contributor to *THE NEWS LETTER*, they fill a need. In the present instance the need may be said to have been filled adequately, even generously.

A special feature of the book is that each of the periods has been treated by a specialist. To avoid any lack of unity that such a method might entail, each of the editors examined closely and made suggestions concerning the period introductions prepared by his colleagues. Because emphasis has been given to long selections rather than to scraps and because of the compendiousness of the book, a user will probably find as little to complain about as is possible when another than himself has made the selection. One such complaint, however, might be that since Professor Shephard went beyond the traditional Books One and Two of *Paradise Lost* he did not include some of the exquisite love poetry of Book Four.

The format, too, is attractive. Each of the twenty-eight plates has four or five half-tone cuts, bled to the edge of the page in the modern manner, making a total of over a hundred illustrations that give a concrete background to the selections. On the end papers appear a useful literary map of England and two old views of London: one of them from Visscher's celebrated engraving (1616), the other from the *Illustrated London News*

## Toward a Resolution

*The Paradox in a Circle*, Theodore Spencer; New Directions, Norfolk, Conn. No. 5. "The Poet of the Month" Series.

Theodore Spencer prefaces his first published book of poetry with a note:

These poems were written to be read aloud. A number of them are included in an album of recordings made by the author which may be obtained from New Directions.

And so we have an effort to resolve the paradox of modern poetry through a modern science by which the warmth of the poet's voice revitalizes the cold printed word.

Handsomely printed by The Prairie Press, *The Paradox in a Circle* contains forty-six deft, sophisticated lyrics shot through with an intellectual (rather literary) nostalgia. These verses are modern, easily intelligible, sometimes humorous (in the Elizabethan as well as the modern sense), gracefully presenting riddles rather than difficulties.

Twenty-six of the forty-six poems and three others not included in the volume may be obtained on three twelve-inch discs released by Harvard University, so that it is a simple and gratifying matter to listen to Mr. Spencer's cultivated voice while following the text. I have found, in fact, that the author's excellent reading makes the text generally superfluous and that awareness of a relatively high number of variant readings presents a new distraction to come between the poet and his auditor.

This particular combination of text and records is only a step towards a resolution. There are a number of quite minor defects, and accordingly the more annoying and unfortunate. To begin with, the order of the poems on the records and in the text does not coincide. The pages of the text are not numbered. A poem included on one disc (P-1028—"A Kind of Truth") is not listed on the record label. Titles of poems are reduplicated. The net result is distraction; concentration is frequently scattered rather than focused.

These trivial complaints should not prevent anyone from realizing, however, that with text and records Mr. Spencer's poems reach his audience more completely than by any other means short of a private reading by the author.

H. O. Werner  
Washington College

(1890). In both of these, famous spires now destroyed by ruthless attacks pierce a sky that one hopes will always look down on a free people, one whose forbears have given us a rich heritage.

C. D.

Nothing that was worthy in the past departs; no truth or goodness realized by man ever dies, or can die; but is all still here, and, recognized or not, lives and works through endless changes.—*Carlyle*.

## A Bid for Students

(Continued from Page 1)

have been forgetting it increasingly. Now with the war effort and with defense courses mushrooming themselves hither and yon, thoughts of what literature can do are crowded out almost entirely.

Our problem is not with the so-called English major. Our problem is to convince more students of the worth of literature. Converts must come from the ranks of the uninterested vocational students if they are to come at all. Simple statistics force us to make a gesture. It is surely not a rebuff to our dignity nor a sacrifice of our ideals to offer books as an inducement which are both sustaining and readily comprehended. As an opening wedge I can think of nothing more effective.

Such a program will at least inculcate good reading habits in those who seldom read, and it might eventually effect a change in attitude toward literature in general when satisfied students pass along their experiences. It is a long-range view. When the pendulum swings away from the technicalities of the conduct of war, there may be more open-mindedness about literature and the arts. But unless we spread a little leaven now, too few will be aware of their potentialities when the time for choices comes.

D. S. Mead  
Pennsylvania State College

## Warnings About Periods

In teaching literary history we are likely to pound Periods and Schools so thoroughly into students' heads that they come to believe in the actual existence of these pigeonholes. Would it not be well to issue (perhaps secretly only to the better students) the following warnings?

- 1) Any author worthy of study is certain not to be very typical of his period but to transcend it. Today's blaze becomes tomorrow's ashes.
- 2) The qualities that we assign to a period are merely its outstanding ones. As in an election with many candidates, they may not even represent the opinions of the majority.
- 3) The outstanding qualities in any period arouse a lesser, quite opposite reaction. So Sir Walter Scott pairs with Jane Austen, Pope with Mother Goose, and Hemingway with Disney.
- 4) Periods are dated by their flowering. Both a preliminary growth and a long decay will be slighted or ignored. So the Romantic Rousseau must be labeled pre-Romantic, and Malory's summary is past the heyday of chivalry.
- 5) In college classrooms (and even during Christmas vacations) arguments which ignore the foregoing warnings about these convenient pigeonholes are doomed never to reach an agreement.

W. L. Werner  
Pennsylvania State College

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## The Tomb of Edgar Poe

(From the French of Mallarmé)

The Poet, changed, by Time, into his own,  
With naked sword inflames a startled age,  
Aghast to know that it misprized his page,  
His strange, wild voice, in death, how mighty grown!  
When to the tribes the purer word is shown,  
Upstart, the Hydra-headed heather rage;  
So lesser men proclaimed his beverage  
Black witches' brew from shameless floods and lone.  
If out of hostile earth and sky, oh grief,  
Our thought can work to carve no bas-relief  
Worthy to mark the dazzling tomb of Poe  
(Calm block here fallen from ill-starred events),  
At least this granite shall forever show  
The bounds to Blasphemy's black insolence.

Wilson O. Clough  
University of Wyoming

## An Experiment With A College Magazine

Simmons is a vocational college and the School of English here provides professional preparation for young women who wish to find employment, on graduation, in publishing, advertising, publicity, or journalism. About four-fifths of the course is in no way different from that of any other women's college. Even though the plan we have put in operation this year for the first time may not seem entirely feasible elsewhere, it may be suggestive to teachers who are interested in a college magazine or who have the often thankless task of acting as advisers to an editorial board of undergraduates.

We decided this year no longer to treat the magazine as an extra-curricular activity, as it had been for years, but to make it a project of seniors and juniors in the School of English, a specific device or implement in teaching. No credit was to be given for work on it, but such work was to be considered a valuable part of each student's experience and professional preparation.

The details of the plan were as follows: Four numbers were to be published, in November, January, March, and May, three by the seniors and one by the juniors. The senior class (22 students) was divided into three sections or shifts, and each shift was asked to elect from its own members an editor-in-chief, business manager, art editor, advertising manager, promotion manager, feature editor, and so on, so that every member should have a specific office and title. It was the duty of each shift to plan, edit, and produce one issue, assuming entire responsibility for format, the obtaining of contributions, subscriptions, and advertisements, and the promotion of sales. Each board

was free, however, to obtain help from other members of the School and even from the entire college. The faculty of the School assumed no control, though it was ready always to give advice and technical criticism.

Although the seniors have now produced their three issues, it is too early to judge entirely of the success of the venture. The fourth issue, for which the juniors are responsible, is yet to appear and the financial picture of the year is incomplete. It is an integral part of the project that the magazine shall if possible pay for itself, without subsidy from the college administration or taxation of the students. This may prove impossible, though at present we are optimistic.

Aside from the risk of a moderate deficit, which is underwritten by the college, the plan has certainly proved a success. The students tell me that they have learned a great deal of value. And the scheme of working in small shifts or boards turns out to be admirable. No student has to assume a burden of extra work for more than two months; the shifts quite naturally try to excel their predecessors; each student is permitted to choose the kind of work she is most interested in.

It has been pleasant to see how skillfully the entire class was divided into groups consisting of young women of various abilities and interests, so that any one interested in art or business or writing or editing, as the case might be, has found an outlet for her desires or ambitions. Students not on a board were privileged to volunteer their services and the sophomores and even the freshmen often did so, proudly helping with even such routine jobs as folding and mailing, typing, and proofreading. Every girl who helped at all was recognized by having her name printed on the title-page, with the result that, instead of the usual six or eight students who edit such a magazine, the total number in our magazine is over fifty.

But the attitude of the class towards the magazine is quite as important as the methods. It was decided that since *Fen-Ways*, as it was named, was to be the college magazine, it must be made readable and interesting to the entire college. This meant that it should be conceived not as a literary magazine but as a popular one. The editors must study their public, realizing that appeal is far more a psychological than a literary matter, and, by story, essay, article, verse, illustration, and format, must catch the attention of the students in general. Since, moreover, a magazine that is supported by subsidy or taxation is never an entirely realistic venture, it was felt that if possible this one must pay for itself. Here was a problem in promotion and advertising, involving the exercise of energy and ingenuity by both the editors and the business managers.

The faculty of the School decided not to interfere in the production of an issue, but after publication to use the issue in class for study and criticism. If the board responsible for it made mistakes,

nobody cared very much, for it was a part of the plan that the students should learn by doing and mistakes were an inevitable part of the doing. Technical difficulties were discovered and overcome in the process.

Nor was the literary and artistic quality of the product a primary concern. Issuing the magazine was viewed as a practical project in editing and publishing, and it was assumed that a general editorial policy would emerge in time. Improvement of the contents would also follow as methods of discovering ability and talent became more efficient. A student body of a thousand has much hidden talent, and the editors were incited to discover this and not merely sit and wait for contributions to come in. A good editor, they were told, is one who plans his magazine and then finds or assigns what he wants.

With each number is included a supplement, folded in (as the Chap Book is in *THE NEWS LETTER*) consisting of critical or research papers written in course by students, and selected by the College Committee on English Usage as models of organization and style. These papers are edited and proofread by members of the faculty and the supplements are paid for by the college.

The titles of those that have appeared this year will suggest the type: "When the Sun Went Down," "Clinical Allergy," "Expressionism in the American Theatre," "Napier's Logarithms and Other Methods of Calculation," "The Etiology of Influenza." Each paper is accompanied by footnotes and a bibliography in the proper form. The idea is that the supplements may be used as required reading in a course or department, and serve as specimens of good exposition written by undergraduates.

It is true, as I said at the beginning, that the use of the magazine as a project is perhaps most appropriate to the plan of study in a vocational school. And yet it can be adapted for use in colleges of other types. Certainly it suggests one way of making a magazine really alive. It is my impression that the college magazine usually leads a forlorn and precarious existence. It is commonly paid for by taxation or subsidy. The editorial board is likely to be composed of students known to be "literary," and the more literary they are the more they try to make it "intellectual," with the result that it is so highbrow that nobody reads it except the editors and their clique.

Of course it might be said that magazines of similar intellectual pretensions in the general market have hard sledding, too, and are usually subsidized. The number that die after a year or two of struggle is very large, and nobody but a cynic would say that they have always lived in vain. A cynic, however, might say that any magazine that cannot find enough readers to support it is better dead; even though, as is no doubt often true, its demise is a reflection on the public. There never has been and is never likely to be agreement on this subject.

Our Simmons venture makes no claim to having solved the problem. It is merely an experiment in vitalizing a student activity that is too often practically dead.

Robert M. Gay  
Simmons College

With things as they are in the Atlantic and the Pacific, what are those young instructors, preening their feathers before a class of freshmen, to say about Shakespeare's famous mixed metaphor: "to take up arms against a sea of troubles"?

J. K. P.

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By Tom B. Haber, Ohio State University. 152 pp. \$1.00. Published, April 15.

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.  
55 Fifth Avenue, New York City

## Plain English Vs. Imaginative Obscurity

(Continued from Page 1)

paratory instructors never penalize students for deficiencies in mechanics or style. Composition is thus associated with literature to the disadvantage of both. As a result of these conditions the correlation between preparatory grades in English and ratings in the Attainment Test is very low. Freshmen are puzzled and discouraged, especially prospective English majors, and high school principals and teachers are chagrined to have steady, unimaginative students do better than honor students, school editors, and valedictorians.

To turn now from preparatory to college studies in English composition. Freshmen who satisfy the Attainment Test have generally elected the sophomore Introduction to English Literature, a course covering eight or ten authors with an average of one theme on a literary subject each week. As mentioned earlier, the freshmen who have not measured up to the standard set by the Attainment Test have taken Freshman Composition, in which contemporary literature serves as a subject for extensive practice in writing plain prose. A standard handbook has been used, all papers have been carefully criticized, and instructor and student have met regularly in conferences. Gradually an increasing number of students has elected the composition course until over half the present freshmen, sophomores, and juniors believe the course in composition should be taken by everyone, though a great many are critical of the way in which the course is conducted. This change in attitude toward Freshman Composition has come largely from the conviction of an overwhelming majority of college students that inability to write plain prose is a serious handicap in all college courses—a conviction for which the English Department can take no credit.

Here is the nub of the problem—until preparatory or college faculties make it clear to students that the ability to write is an asset, if not a prerequisite, for most courses, the general quality of undergraduate prose will never greatly improve. If a college wishes to set a standard, it must also be ready to hold students to the standard and not delegate the responsibility solely to the English faculty.

From what we have learned these past three years, we have devised a course that is at least realistic, though to some it may appear reactionary. The freshman course will be a course in literature. It will open with a modern author and work backwards through one or two novelists, poets, dramatists, and essayists to Chaucer, each author being taken up in a separate volume. There will be a weekly theme, and part of every third hour will be devoted to a criticism of the written work and instruction in the more general principles of good writing. The

main emphasis, however, will be upon the literature.

Again, as in the past, freshmen will take the Attainment Test, the first one coming after four weeks of instruction in the literature course. Those who are found deficient will attend two one-hour laboratory periods a week in addition to the three sessions in the literature course. In one period students will begin writing on the weekly theme while the instructor is present to assist when called upon. In the second period, under the guidance of the instructor, students will dig into the contents of a good grammar and handbook and seek to correct their own deficiencies. The faculty as a whole will be urged to send students to the laboratory periods for help with other papers, but it will be up to the instructors to make the laboratory periods so worthwhile that more and more students will attend the classes. No college credit will be given for the laboratory periods, and only students who have not satisfied the Attainment Test will be required to take it.

By combining in this fashion the Freshman Composition course and the Sophomore Literature course we make the same content serve a double purpose; we place instruction in composition on a non-credit, partly elective basis; the able students are not forced to mark time while others learn what they already know; the transition from preparatory studies to college studies is made in the area in which students are best prepared; and finally an opportunity is given all the faculty to help realize a general college objective.

I wonder if we can ever win over our colleagues to Tom Sawyer's point of view when he set about whitewashing Aunt Polly's board fence:

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

George M. Kahrl  
Elmira College

## Let's Be Sensible About Slang

(Continued from Page 1)

the double negative (despite its historical authority) as illogical.

No lover of the English language would, of course, wish to see its natural growth and enrichment swaddled by such dogmatic restrictions as those imposed by the French Academy upon their language. And, incidentally, the grammar published by the Forty Immortals some ten years ago had to be suppressed. But surely there should be some brake on the power of mere illiteracy to bring grammar and syntax to a state of anarchy. It would seem that a professor of language and literature might and should stand for a popular usage allied to literary diction at least in the matter of grammatical structure, yet permitting it to rove, fancy free, in the domain of easy colloquialisms and picturesque slang. Isn't that what professors of English are for? But with so many whose

political and social views are getting red, one may perhaps expect a few syntactical revolutionaries as well.

Whether this is quibbling or not, it is no disparagement of the scholarship and usefulness of *The Story of Our Language*. The information given in the book should be a part of every reader's and especially every writer's education. The first chapter alone contains so many fundamental truths and is so suggestive that it should be prescribed reading for students. Elsewhere the examples of typical kinds of word-transformations are well chosen and illuminating. The book is especially rich in its treatment of the differences between Standard British and American English—a topic of increasing importance to Americans because of our ever-strengthening alliance with Britain.

Gelett Burgess

Swore a wise, young A.M., Ph.D.,  
"By Curme, I won't say, 'It is he.'  
We'll have no such fool rule  
In my normal school!  
For I'm democratic, that's me."

## No Shortage of Paper For Textbooks So Far

Supplies of newsprint and book paper, according to a recent statement by Price Administrator Leon Henderson, appear adequate for 1942, in spite of the fact that defense activities are consuming about 20 per cent of the nation's output.

Furthermore, book quality paper constitutes only 6 per cent of total paper consumption, and only one-half of one per cent is used by book publishers in the production of both trade and textbooks. Magazines, catalogues, advertising, sheet music, circulars, and other printed matter take the rest.

Unfortunately, Mr. Henderson says, rumors of a shortage have made it difficult to get deliveries, and undoubtedly there is extensive hoarding by some users, which has magnified whatever shortage may actually exist. Otherwise, the Price Administrator believes, supplies of paper would be fairly adequate for all users.

This does not mean that the prices of textbooks will not be affected. J. R. Tiffany, general counsel of the Book Manufacturers Institute, states that within the past few years the cost of making a book has increased at least 35 per cent; binder's board has increased 40 per cent in the past year; cloth, 25 per cent; thread 30 per cent. So far actual increases in prices to consumers have not reached these figures.

There is a real shortage in bleaching materials, however, and already book papers are not as white as they have been. Anyone who filled out a Federal income tax blank this year and last realizes that last year's blank compared favorably with this year's in quality of paper as well as in the amount of tax due!

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